



The President's Daily Brief

May 19, 1975

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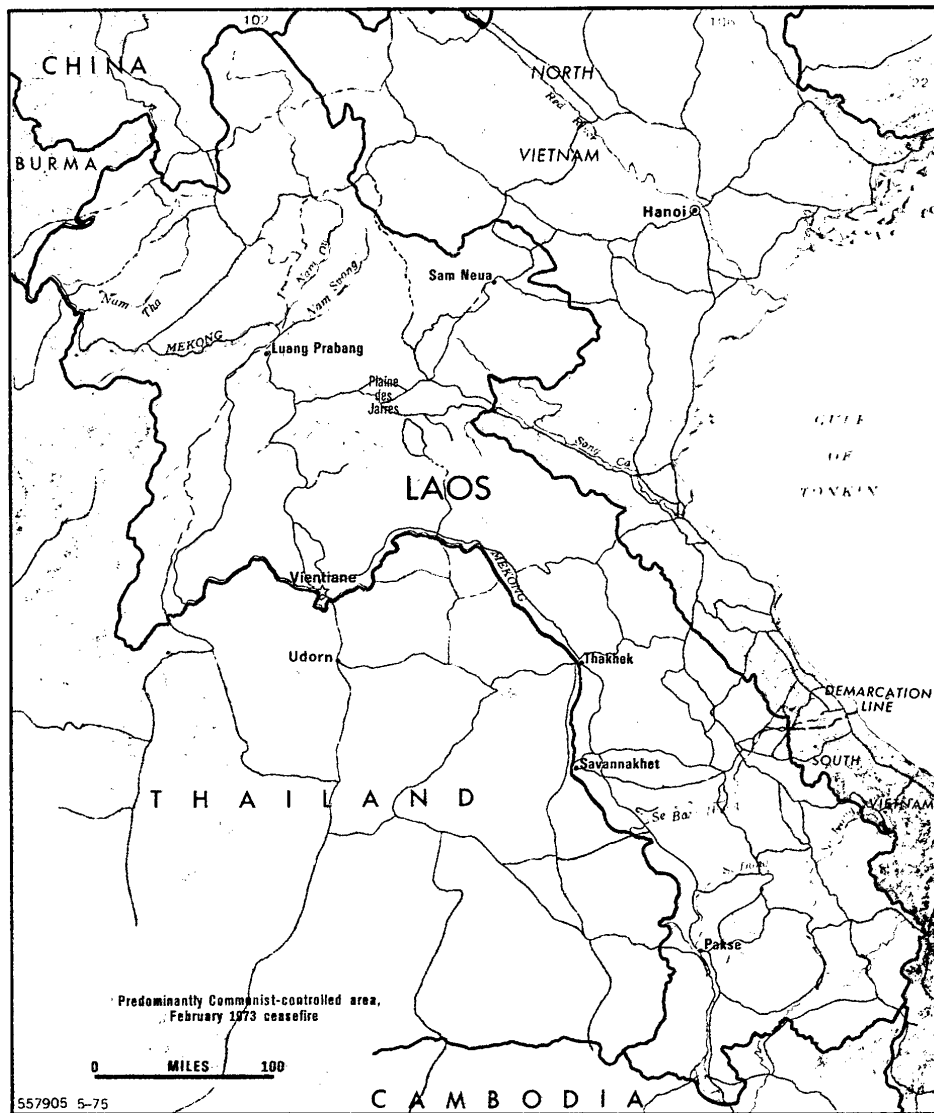
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LAOS

No major demonstrations occurred in Vientiane over the weekend. [redacted]

[redacted] communist - inspired demonstrators and "mass rallies" against the US and the rightists are scheduled this week in Vientiane.

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[redacted] the protests will begin today--Ho Chi Minh's birthday--with a march on the USAID housing compound in the capital's suburbs. The demonstrators are reportedly prepared to occupy the compound and turn its contents over to the coalition government.

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[redacted] Lao communists plan to zero in on neutralist members of the coalition government as well. Demonstrations calling for the ouster of neutralist Interior Minister Pheng Phongsavan are reported to be on the drawing boards. Until the recent collapse of the non-communist side of the coalition, Pheng was considered a leading candidate to succeed Souvanna Phouma as prime minister. The demonstrators will demand that Pheng be replaced by his deputy, communist minister Deuane Sonnarath.

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The situation at Savannakhet has not changed significantly. Three AID officials and their families remain under a loose form of "voluntary house arrest."

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Negotiations between the demonstrators and representatives of the coalition cabinet for release of the detainees were scheduled to begin last Friday, but the two cabinet ministers involved--Interior Minister Pheng and his deputy Deuane--have not left Vientiane. Deuane is reluctant to go to Savannakhet.

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In Thakhek, meanwhile, demonstrations by several hundred students, soldiers, policemen, civil servants, and unemployed laborers are continuing. The protests, apparently non-violent, are directed against the AID compound and the local public works office. [redacted] the disturbances have not yet generated large-scale participation or support among the local population or nearby villagers. This non-participation may be due primarily to rice planting under way throughout the Thakhek area.

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In the far south, communist troops have entered the former rightist stronghold of Pakse in force. Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma had earlier requested that no more than two platoons of Lao communists enter the town, but one account has between 400 and 500 communist troops and three tanks in Pakse as of this morning.

Pheng has ordered Royal Lao Army General Soutchay, nominally commander of the southern provinces, to cooperate with the communists and so far there are no reports of resistance.

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CAMBODIA

Phnom Penh has issued several statements in the aftermath of the Mayaguez affair alleging that the US bombing missions against mainland facilities and the landings on Koh Tang Island had occurred after the ship's crew had been returned.

Prince Sihanouk--who earlier had refused to comment on the incident--told journalists in Peking yesterday that he fully supported Phnom Penh's handling of the affair and quoted from a cable of congratulations he had sent to Deputy Prime Minister Khieu Samphan on Saturday. Sihanouk made his comments before leaving by train for a "good-will" visit to North Korea.

Sihanouk as much as admitted during an interview on Saturday that the leadership in Phnom Penh is deliberately delaying his return when he told a Japanese correspondent that he had been "advised" to postpone his departure for Cambodia until public facilities in Phnom Penh had been repaired. On May 12, Sihanouk turned down a request for an interview with a French journalist saying he was "not in a position to speak" for the new Cambodian authorities and that "my service to the national resistance movement ended with the liberation of Phnom Penh." Although Sihanouk is obviously finding his long wait humiliating, there is still every sign that he will return as soon as he gets the green light from Phnom Penh.

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PORTUGAL

Rumors continue to circulate in Lisbon that radical officers in the Armed Forces Movement, having forced the resignation of the air force chief of staff last week, will move soon to purge additional moderates from the ruling Revolutionary Council.

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The radicals may make their move today during the armed forces general assembly meeting. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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For the radicals to succeed [REDACTED] they must be able to exercise considerable control over the votes of the 240-member assembly. Although the assembly is probably more left-wing than its predecessor, which was restructured after the March coup attempt, the radicals will have a difficult time undercutting the widespread support Costa Gomes enjoys within the armed forces.

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Costa Gomes usually has remained neutral in political disputes and has managed to emerge unscathed from past power struggles. He may have become less acceptable to radicals, however, by making statements that were widely interpreted as being pro-Socialist after the constituent assembly elections. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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Costa Gomes reportedly is aware of a possible move against him and may be planning some defensive tactics of his own.

Members of a left-wing army unit, in a broadcast over national radio yesterday, announced that they had discovered a major counter-revolutionary plot and urged all military units to join in a manhunt. The communiqué did not name any of the so-called plotters, but posters identified two of them as a director of the Social Democratic Center party and a Supreme Court judge. The announcement followed a left-wing demonstration in front of the US embassy. A military spokesman refused to confirm or deny reports that the armed forces have been placed on full alert.

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EGYPT-FEDAYEEN

A leading Egyptian columnist, Ihsan Abd al-Quddus, on May 16 urged the Palestine Liberation Organization to exclude itself from the Geneva conference in order to avoid giving the US and the Soviets an "excuse" to stop their efforts to achieve a peace settlement. Many of the views expressed in his column do not coincide with President Sadat's, but Quddus is close to the President, and some of his ideas clearly reflect Sadat's frustrations with the PLO.

Quddus claims that the US and the USSR have despaired of ever reconciling the Arab and the Israeli positions and have therefore resolved to freeze the status quo. Both powers, he asserts, are determined to guarantee Israel's existence within its 1967 borders and look on the PLO's refusal to grant this recognition as an excuse to avoid convening the Geneva conference.

While stating his sympathy with the PLO's position, Quddus called on the organization to accept a formula that could resolve the impasse but would effectively exclude the PLO from negotiations. He urged that Jordan, Syria, or the Arab League be permitted to speak for the PLO at Geneva, on the understanding that West Bank territory regained through these negotiations would be turned over to the Palestinians.

Although Quddus' column places the "blame" for the current stalemate over the Palestinian issue on the superpowers, the implication of his remarks is that the PLO, rather than the superpowers or Israel, must accommodate and compromise.

During his visit to four Arab states last week, Sadat made little effort to hide his dissatisfaction with the PLO's indecisiveness on whether and under what representational formula it would attend the Geneva conference. Asked during a press conference in Kuwait how he would resolve the issue, Sadat replied somewhat peevishly that the question might better be asked of the Palestinians themselves--who, he indicated, have not yet even decided whether to go to Geneva.

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At a later press conference in Jordan, Sadat referred to his fruitless efforts last year to resolve the Palestinian representation issue and, without saying so directly, implied that the PLO's rejection of his proposals last year has prolonged the impasse until the present.

Sadat undoubtedly tried again during his trip to gain Arab support for a formula that would obscure the PLO presence at Geneva. He also met with PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat yesterday in Damascus, but there is no indication that he succeeded with the PLO.

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NOTES

Thai Foreign Minister Chatchai has expressed satisfaction with the US note on the use of Thai bases during the Mayaguez incident. Chatchai told reporters in Bangkok that he considers the note "a formal apology" because it reaffirms US respect for Thai sovereignty and indicates that such use of Thai bases will not recur. Radio broadcasts from Bangkok have also described the note as an "apology."

Student-led demonstrations at the US embassy remained peaceful over the weekend. Several thousand protesters gathered outside the embassy on Saturday but the crowd had dwindled to a handful by this morning. Before the US note was delivered, student leaders had called colleagues in the countryside to join the protest and Thai trade union representatives had discussed plans for disrupting American-owned businesses and official installations.

* * *

Syria's ambassador to the UN has told some of his colleagues that he is confident Damascus will authorize a two-month renewal of the UN Disengagement Observer Force mandate on the Golan Heights.

The mandate expires on May 31, and UN Security Council officials expect a council debate on the issue early next week. Although Syria has not officially signaled its intentions, we expect Damascus to extend the mandate until July 24 to coincide with Egypt's extension on the Sinai front. The statement of Syria's UN ambassador follows rumors over the past several weeks that Syria favors aligning its policy on this issue with Egypt's.

* * *

The Romanians may be interested in buying additional long-range Boeing 707s.

They will begin talks this week on the purchase of five aircraft. Romania already has three 707s, the only US-made aircraft owned by a Warsaw Pact country. Bucharest may be expanding its airline because of its success with long-range charters to New York. The Romanians' interest may also reflect their belief that a purchase now would influence Congressional consideration of the US-Romanian trade agreement.

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